



Critical Thinking Skills Activity

Interpreting Points of View

SOCIAL STUDIES OBJECTIVE: Recognize points of view in a written text.



Learning the Skill

A **point of view** is a person's opinion or belief about something. People can and do have different points of view about historical, political, and social issues. There are many factors that affect a person's point of view. These include age, gender, ethnic background, and religion. It is important to recognize, or interpret, an author's point of view when you are using information. It is also important to understand the particular time in history, or the historical context, helping to form that point of view. For example, during a war, what is written or said about "the enemy" is often much different than what is said during peacetime. Knowing about various points of view will help you determine the objectivity of an argu-

ment or the accuracy of a description. It also helps you develop your own ideas and opinions. To interpret points of view, use the following steps:

- Read the material to identify the general subject.
- Gather information on the author's background. Determine whether the author's background reveals his or her point of view.
- Identify aspects of the topic the author chooses to emphasize or exclude.
- Look for emotionally charged words such as *cruel*, *drastic*, *lunacy*, or *never*, *worst*, or *should*, which would suggest a personal opinion.
- Think about what other points of view might exist on that subject. You may want to compare other viewpoints on the subject.

Applying the Skill

Directions: Read the following information. It was adapted from an article written by Joseph A. Califano, former United States Secretary of Health, Education, and Welfare, in February 1998. Then answer the questions on the next page.

Since 1980, America's prison population has more than tripled. It has grown from 500,000 to over 1.7 million. Why? Drug and alcohol abuse and addiction are the most to blame. Alcohol is connected with more violent crimes than crack, cocaine, heroin, or any other illegal drug. In state prisons, 21 percent of the inmates found guilty of violent crimes were under the influence of alcohol when they committed those crimes.

The purpose of our criminal justice and prison systems is to protect the public's safety. They do so by keeping repeat offenders off the street. They are also supposed to help as many other criminals as possible to become productive citizens. However, the current policy is to only punish criminals by sending them to prison. The

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